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RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002091

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2018  
TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [IS](#) [PBTS](#) [PTER](#)  
SUBJECT: SETTLERS BRACE FOR BATTLE OVER DISPUTED HEBRON  
COMPOUND

REF: JERUSALEM 1260

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. The Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) on November 16 ordered the settlers occupying the Rajabi compound (referred to by settlers as "Beit Hashalom") in Hebron to evacuate voluntarily within three days while a district court determines ownership. Press report that the IDF plans to enforce the order within thirty days. Some one thousand settlers held an emergency meeting on November 19 in Kiryat Arba to prepare to resist -- including by force -- any IDF attempt to evacuate the building. Press report that protesting settlers clashed with Israeli security forces on the night of November 19; one soldier was injured, a mosque and several Palestinian gravestones were desecrated. End summary.

Settlers Dispute HCJ Decision  
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12. (C) On November 16, the HCJ ordered settlers to leave the disputed Rajabi compound (referred to by settlers as "Beit Hashalom") between Kiryat Arba and central Hebron within three days while the district court determines ownership. Some 20 families (100 settlers) have been living in the unfinished, 40,000 square foot compound since March 12007. Press report that the IDF intends to implement the order within thirty days. Settlers and activists predicted to Poloffs that the evacuation would not occur within the next week due to the November 22 reading of "Chayei Sarah," the Torah portion that describes how the Patriarch Abraham purchased a tomb for his wife Sarah. The annual reading of this Torah portion usually attracts some 20,000 overnight visitors to Hebron.

13. (C) Kiryat Arba settler Elyakim Haeztzni told Poloffs on November 19 that his son Nadav Haeztzni, who represents the settlers, had presented overwhelming evidence to the district court "proving" that Palestinian Faez Rajabi had received payment for the property. Haeztzni said the court believed Rajabi's claim that he later rejected the sale and returned the money, and dismissed an audio tape of a conversation in which Rajabi purportedly admits to selling the property. Hebron settlers' spokesman David Wilder told Poloff November 19 that the court had "ignored the information and that the Israeli justice system is politically motivated." Elyakim Haeztzni told Poloffs that the decision was a "great miscarriage of justice," and settlers are a "persecuted minority" in Israel, against whom "character assassination" has been waged.

"If you are Beaten, Beat Back";  
Clashes as Tension Rises  
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14. (C) Wilder told Poloff November 19 that settlers are

barricading themselves in the compound to protect its residents and prevent implementation of the HCJ decision. On November 19, Poloffs saw hundreds of signs across the southern West Bank urged settlers to attend an emergency meeting in Kiryat Arba. According to Wilder and activist group Women in Green, some one thousand people attended a meeting in Kiryat Arba's gymnasium to prepare to resist the evacuation. Haetzni, who also attended the meeting, said settler rabbis told the crowd, "if you are beaten during the evacuation, beat back." Haetzni, who helped found the Hebron settlement, told Poloffs that he had "never seen such anger" from the settlers or their rabbis. Wilder said the meeting included practical presentations that advised settlers to bring knee pads, helmets, gloves, and gas masks to resist when Israeli security forces enforce the eviction.

15. (C) Yesha Council Chairman Dani Dayan told Poloff November 19 that the situation is "very bad," involving "very serious confrontations," and that, "we have to find a way to solve it peacefully." Dayan said even moderate settlers feel betrayed by the HCJ decision, because they believe the house was legally purchased.

16. (U) Press reported on November 20 that settlers clashed November 19 with Israeli security forces near the disputed compound; one soldier was injured when a settler threw turpentine at him. Offensive graffiti was sprayed on a Hebron mosque and on several Palestinian gravestones.

WALLES